NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

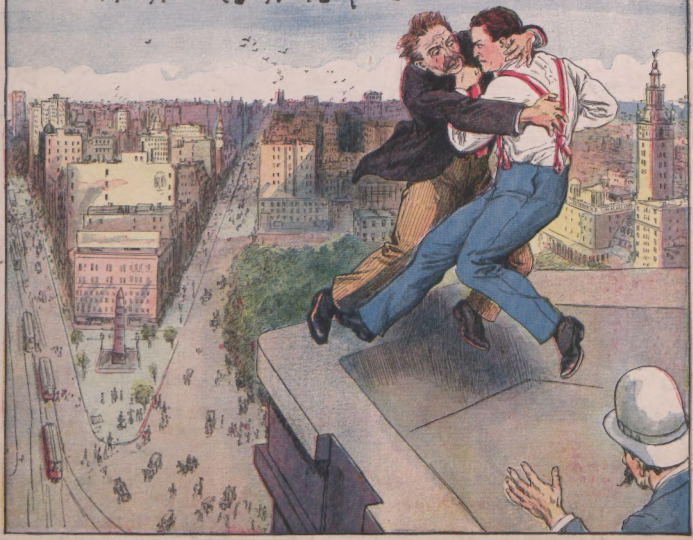
Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 484 NEW YORK, APRIL 7, 1906. **Price, Five Cents**

A BATTLE AMONG THE CLOUDS

OR NICK CARTER'S CRIMINAL CLIENT

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



Leaping forward, Nick succeeded in seizing the madman. The next instant they were locked together in a terrible struggle, almost on the edge of the roof.

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A BATTLE AMONG THE CLOUDS;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S CRIMINAL CLIENT.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A SEVERED EAR.

When Nick Carter entered his house one evening, exactly a week after he had closed up the case which had been entered on his books under the caption of "The Murder Problem," he found awaiting him a tall, dignified, faultlessly attired gentleman, whose age might have been anywhere between thirty-eight and fifty years.

His hair, of which there was an abundance, was as white as snow; his long, military-shaped mustache and imperial were of the same hue; but his skin was as smooth and fair as a lad's of sixteen or twenty might have been, and his large, round black eyes were as filled with expression as a girl's.

Joseph had informed the detective that a gentleman was awaiting him in the reception-room, and Nick went there at once.

"You wished to see me?" he said interrogatively, as he entered the room

"Yes, Mr. Carter; if you can spare me a little of your time," came the reply, in a soft, deep, musical voice which impressed the detective instantly as if hidden in it somewhere there were a familiar note or two.

He smiled back at the stranger, and glanced at his watch.

"I shall be leaving the house again in about an hour, sir," he said. "If you think you can transact your business with me in half of that time, I can see you now; otherwise I will have to make an appointment with you for another time."

"I think half-an-hour will be sufficient, Mr. Carter. Indeed, I have no doubt that I can tell you all there is to tell in half that time."

"Very well, sir, if in that case you will step into the library, I will rejoin you in a moment."

The detective conducted his client in person to the library, and then withdrew to his own room, from which he presently returned, prepared for the interview.

The stranger approached the subject of his call at once, and began it by introducing himself properly.

"I am Colonel Pearsall," he said. "A retired officer of the army. Here is my card, if you will be good enough to accept it. You will find my address there—rather well up-town, on the west side."

The detective glanced at the card and nodded his head; then he glanced at it again, and shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"You don't reside very far from the address where I have lately been engaged upon a case, colonel," he said.

"I suppose," replied the colonel, "that you refer to that very sad affair of Jeremy Jones, do you not?"

"Yes."

"I was deeply interested when I read in the papers about that sad affair. I am told that both of the Jones mansions are to be razed to the ground, and that two rows of houses are to be erected on both sides of the short street. In fact, work has already been begun on the house where the crimes were committed—however, that has nothing to do with my affair."

"I suppose not."

"Do you happen to remember having seen the house in which I reside?"

"I don't think that I recall it," replied the detective.

"Possibly you will do so when I describe it more definitely than by the number. It is situated just over the brow of the hill, where the street makes an abrupt descent to the river. You recall, of course, that there is a very steep hill there?"

"Certainly."

"I think that the steepest part of the entire hill along Washington Heights, is on that street where I live; and now you will recall the house itself, as standing almost on the edge of the bluff, overlooking the river. It is a large, two-story, frame house, built rather squat upon the ground. It stands back from the street, and is surrounded by about two acres of ground. There is an old stable there, now almost in ruins, and——"

"I remember it now, perfectly. I had supposed that the house was not occupied; and had not been lived in for some time."

"That is, in fact, true, save for my own occupation of the place," was the quiet reply. "And it is barely a month ago since I took the house."

"I was also under the impression," said the detective, "that the house stood in the track of the land condemned by the city for the extension of Riverside Drive."

"It does. I rent it from the city—at an exceedingly nominal figure—with the understanding that I may vacate at any time on very short notice."

"I see. Well?"

"Since I have resided in that house, Mr. Carter—and I have already informed you that it is barely a month since I went there—I have constantly been made the recipient of anonymous and threatening letters, and I have also been compelled to submit to the most unheard of nuisances that can be imagined."

The detective raised his eyebrows a little in surprise.

The statement was rather extraordinary, and he did not pretend to understand it.

"You will have to be more particular in your explanation," he said dryly.

The military-looking stranger seemed to hesitate a moment, and then, with great deliberation of manner, he removed from one of his pockets a small parcel done up in yellow paper, and having partly removed the wrappings, he leaned forward and laid the parcel on the detective's knee.

"Will you look at the contents of that paper?" he asked quietly.

The detective was rather puzzled by the manner of the request. However, he did as he had been requested to do; and the next moment he looked up angrily at the man who sat opposite him.

"Is this some hideous joke which you dare to perpetrate upon me?" he demanded; and with a quick motion he wrapped the paper again around the object it contained, and flung it unceremoniously back again into the hands of his caller.

The thing done up in the package, upon which the detective had looked, was, in truth, a human ear, and was about as disgusting an object to contemplate as can well be imagined.

Colonel Pearsall, however, remained unmoved. He merely shrugged his shoulders, while a half smile flitted across his rather handsome countenance.

"I know that I owe you an apology," he said, "and I make it. I, perhaps, should not have exhibited that loathsome object to you in just the manner I did, but I did wish, at once, to impress you with the significance of what I have been made to suffer."

"Colonel Pearsall," said Nick coldly, "you will be good enough to explain fully, exactly what you mean, and do so at once, or I will be obliged to bring the interview to a close."

"Mr. Carter," replied the colonel, "I do not blame you at all for your resentment. It is quite natural, under the circumstances; but when I tell you that the severed ear I have just shown to you is only one of the many annoyances to which I have been subjected, and to which I have already referred, you will pardon me, I know, for having taken that method of convincing you of the truth of what I am about to tell you."

"Well, sir?"

"That severed ear is the fourth ear I have received in the manner in which this one was brought to me. There have also been several fingers; there have been three toes; an occasional part of a nose; once there was a piece of an upper lip, with a part of the mustache of a man still

clinging to it—I think that about comprehends a list of the variety of articles that have been brought to me."

"Brought to you where?"

"At my home; in the house that I have already described to you."

"Brought to you—how?"

"Ah! That is a question which I wish you to answer for me. That is why I am here."

"Do you mean that these hideous objects are left at your door?"

"No. I mean that they are left on my bureau; on my dresser; on my desk, where I write my letters; on the mantel over the fireplace; on a chair, where I am likely to sit—anywhere, in short, where I will be apt to discover them immediately after entering the room."

"And you have no knowledge of how they get there?"

"None whatever."

"And do not suspect who brings them to you?"

"I have not the remotest idea as to that."

"How do the messengers who leave these awful things with you obtain admittance to your home?"

"That is another question to which I find it impossible to reply. I do not know."

"Have you found no traces of their method of gaining admittance to the house?"

"Not one."

"And it is securely locked, at night, I suppose."

"Always."

"When are these things left with you—at night, or during the day?"

"Both, sir. More frequently I discover them in the morning, when I rise; but also I have found them in the afternoon, upon returning to the house after a short absence."

"How many persons live in that house with you?"

"Two; they are both servants."

"You have no family?"

"No; I am alone."

"Who, and what, are these servants?"

"Chinamen—both of them. One acts as cook and the other as general servant."

"Have they been with you long?"

"Only since I have lived in that house."

"Where did you procure them?"

"From a Chinaman who runs a restaurant on Broadway near Forty-second Street."

"Do these servants speak English?"

"One of them, not at all; the other quite indifferently, but enough to understand and to make himself understood."

"Do you suspect that the servants, or either of them, might, by any possibility, be connected with this thing?"

"Frankly, I do not. I have thought of that as an explanation, but I have utterly dismissed the idea."

"Have you an enemy, anywhere in the world, who could be capable of this thing, if it were possible for him to accomplish it?"

"I do not know of any such person."

"Humph!" said the detective. "A moment ago, you referred to anonymous letters; do you happen to have one of them with you?"

"Yes; I have several."

"One will answer for the present. Let me see it."

Again the man had recourse to one of his pockets, and again he brought out a parcel; but this time it contained nothing more shocking than several envelopes.

Selecting one of these, he removed the letter that it contained, and, having passed it to the detective, he settled back in his chair to wait until Nick Carter had read it through to the end.

CHAPTER II.

THE WORK OF UNSEEN ENEMIES.

The detective, for reasons of his own, read the letter aloud.

"'Colonel Pearsall,'" he read. "'You have been warned often enough to vacate this house. You are not wanted here at all. Your presence annoys us extremely, and if you insist upon remaining, you will be murdered in your sleep one of the nights, when you least expect it. We won't trouble those two chinks of yours, for they are harmless, and they will go away as soon as you do. But go you must, and that settles it. We won't say just when it is our intention to kill you, and to cut you up, for we are not quite ready to do it as yet. But that we will do so sometime, if you do not get out, the things we send to you are sufficient proof. We are scientific individuals who delight in cutting human bodies in small pieces—and after a little while, when we run out of subjects, we will cut you up—if you have not made yourself scarce around the neighborhood where you now live.'"

The detective refolded the letter and retained it in his hand.

"What about the others?" he asked.

"They are all about the same. Here they are if you wish to see them."

The colonel passed the other letters over to the detective, who took them and read them to himself, one by one, until he had examined all of them—and there were six.

But, as his client had said, they were all about the same. Indeed, the language of them was strikingly similar in each case, and the burden of them all was that the writer wished the colonel to vacate the house in which he lived, without delay.

"How long a time have you been a recipient of this sort of thing?" asked the detective.

"Ever since I have lived in the house."

"When did you receive the first letter?"

"The morning after the first night that I spent in the house."

"Did one of the hideous objects you have mentioned come with it?"

"Yes; an ear; not unlike this one here."

"And from time to time since then, you have received other warnings of the same kind?"

"Yes. At frequent intervals."

"Are the letters always accompanied by some part of a human body?"

"Always; but I have received the other sort of thing several times, without the letters."

"I see. They are left with you as silent reminders, eh?"

"I suppose so. It is not pleasant."

"No; hardly that. The only wonder is that you have not taken warning and left the house long ago."

"I am not easily frightened, Mr. Carter."

"So I should imagine. Nine men out of ten would have gotten out of there at once."

"Then I suppose I may consider myself the tenth man."

"You have no idea of being driven out of the house, eh?"

"Not at all."

"But suppose the writers of these letters should decide to carry their threats into execution?"

"Then, in that case, I would be a dead one, I suppose."

"Have you no fear that they will murder you, as they assert they will do?"

"I have a good deal of fear of it--but not the sort of fear that will force me to run like a coward. You see, Mr. Carter, it is this way: I think, each time that I receive a warning, whether it be in the form of an ear or a nose or otherwise, that I will manage to protect myself so that at the very next visitation from these people, they will find me on my guard and ready for them. I have set up night after night with a revolver in my hand, ready to shoot, and to shoot to kill, at the least sign of the presence of a stranger."

"And you have never had an opportunity to shoot?"

"Never."

"They manage each time to get into your home without alarming you, eh?"

"Yes; and they do it perfectly."

"You might set traps for them."

"Set traps for them! I have set traps until I can think of nothing new to create in the form of a trap. I have set bear-traps with cruel springs upon them—traps that would hold a man, or break his leg if it caught him. I have stretched lengths of thread so fine that it was almost invisible, all over the house, where a stranger must have run against it and broken a strand, if he entered the house at all, and I have attached tinkling bells to those threads, so that if one were broken, a bell would ring and warn me."

"Well?"

"The bells do not ring; the threads remain unbroken, but the messages are brought to me just the same."

"It is remarkable, isn't it?"

"Remarkable? It is fiendish. If I were a man who would permit himself to submit to fright, I should either have run away long ago—or I should have been driven mad."

"And as it is, what is your present inclination?"

"My inclination is to stay there until either they kill me, as they threaten to do, or until I have driven them away, or have captured them, or have killed one or more of them."

"I notice that you always refer to your annoyers in the plural. Have you any material reason for supposing that there is more than one of them?"

"No; only that it does not seem possible that one individual alone could accomplish all that has been done."

"I agree with you there."

"I am determined to fight it out, Mr. Carter. I am a soldier, as you are aware, and I have never yet shown my back to the enemy. I shall not begin now."

"I applaud your decision, and yet you are running a great risk."

"I have undertaken risks all my life, sir. I shall not run away from one now."

"And what has brought you to me?"

"The desire to place the matter in your hands; to say to you that you can do as you will in that house, that you can remain inside it night and day if you care to do so, that you can direct me and order me about as you please, and that in each case I will obey you without question, and, finally, to assure you that if you will disclose this series of mysteries, get rid of those people for me, and capture, if possible, any of them, so that we can understand the mysterious side of it, I will give you the sum of ten thousand dollars."

"That seems to place the power entirely in my hands."

"That is precisely what I mean to do."

"And suppose, in the carrying out of what I consider to be my duty, I should order you to take a trip somewhere—to go away and leave me for a time in sole possession of the place—what then?"

"I have already said that I would obey orders."

"Tell me what you know about the history of the house before you took it?"

"I know nothing about it at all, save that it is the oldest structure—or is supposed to be the oldest—that exists to-day on Manhattan Island."

"Is that true? I did not know of that."

"I was told so; that is all I know about it."

"What more?"

"I was told that the original house was erected on that site, almost a century before the War of the Revolution, and that, in fact, the beams and the foundation of the building are the same to-day as they were then. I have

been told that the house itself has been partly destroyed by fire—and otherwise—several times during the more than two centuries that it has existed—and that about covers all I know."

"In short, the house is practically the same as it was two hundred and fifty years ago."

"Exactly."

"Do you know when the present structure was erected?"

"No; I only know that it is very old."

"You have lived there a month?"

"About that."

"Where did you live before you took that house?"

"At hotels, chiefly. I had no settled place of living at all. I had been traveling for pleasure for many years. I did not really live anywhere at all."

"You are not a native New Yorker?"

"My people came from Long Island."

"I suppose you have no idea that these threats are directed at you, personally—I mean, because of any personal enmity toward you?"

"No, I have not. I think they are directed at me only because I live in the house."

"Do I understand you to say that you positively have no idea whatever as to how the intruders gain admittance to the house?"

"You do."

"By the doors or the windows?"

"I haven't the least idea in the world."

"Or by secret doors, or underground passages? I have just closed a case where a house was a perfect honeycomb of such things, strange as it may seem in this age."

"I have thought of that explanation, and I have looked for such things—but without success."

"Have those Chinamen of yours ever been disturbed?"

"Never at all."

"Have they seen nothing of these intruders?"

"Nothing that I know about."

"Or found the ears and noses and fingers and toes, and such things?"

"No. Those things seem always to be left where I will be the first to discover them."

"Almost as if the person who left them there for you, took pains that it should be so."

"I think there is no doubt of that."

"Have you ever mentioned the subject to the Chinamen?"

"No."

"Have you not asked them to watch with you?"

"No. I have said nothing at all to either of them. They are good servants, and I do not care to drive them away, as I surely would do if they became frightened."

"Have you watched them, so that you are positive that they have nothing to do with the performances themselves?"

"Yes. I am positive about that."

"And that they are not in league with the person or persons who perform these miracles?"

"I am pretty positive of that, too."

That same strange smile which had once before, during the interview, flitted across the face of the client, appeared there again for a moment, and Nick noticed it. This time he referred to it, for, somehow, he did not like the smile, or the expression it conveyed.

"Something seems to amuse you," he said dryly.

"Something does, sir. It all amuses me, intensely, if one will only look at the ludicrous side of it. Is it not preposterous that such things can occur in the manner I have described, and in this day and age?"

"I suppose it is," Nick admitted.

"May I hope that you will take the case, Mr. Carter?"

"Oh, yes. I will take it. It interests me."

"I am glad of that. It relieves me greatly. When may I expect you to visit me at the old house?"

"There is no time like the present. I will go there with you now."

"But I understood you to say that you had an engagement."

"I will forego it. Have you a conveyance with you?"

"No; I came on the car."

"Then, if you will dispose yourself with one of the books here for a few moments, I will order around the automobile. We will still have about an hour of daylight after we get to your home, and I should be able to pretty well understand the surrounding in that time."

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE ON THE BLUFF.

The house in question was not one which would attract attention from the average person who passed it upon the street.

It was rather large and rambling in appearance, and yet it was low, and old.

It stood low down, in a sort of hollow, too, notwithstanding the fact that it was perched almost on the edge of the bluff overlooking the river; but the street had been graded to a greater height than the old road upon which the house had fronted originally.

In passing through the gate one had to descend several steps. After that there was a winding walk of cobblestones which looked as if they had been selected from along the shore of the river, a century ago, or more.

This walk brought you to a wide, low stoop, which extended quite across the front of the structure, and then turned one of the corners, where it ended at an octagonal window, which extended out from the main structure, a dozen feet or more.

On the opposite side of the house there was a wing,

and there a porch of three steps was in front of the door.

The grounds around the house were grown up with weeds and sumac, so that it presented almost the appearance of a young forest. Through this, one could dimly see the ruin of the old barn, far in the rear.

"It is rather an odd place for you to select as a residence," was the comment of the detective, as they approached the house along the winding cobble pathway.

The colonel nodded, but he made no reply in words.

"It is a large house," continued Nick. "It must contain a great many rooms."

"Twenty-four altogether," was the laconic reply.

"And you cannot possibly use so many."

"Bless you, no! I use only a few of them. The parlor, the library, a bedroom, the kitchen and dining-room, and one room for the Chinamen. So far as I know, that is all."

Nothing more was said until they entered the house, where the host conducted the detective at once to what he called the library, although there was a surprising lack of books there.

There was one case, however, that was filled with them, and the case, as well as the books it contained, looked new.

"This is your living-room, I suppose?" said the detective. "The place where you pass the greater part of your time while you are in the house; eh?"

"Yes; all of it, in fact, when I am not sleeping or eating."

"Where do you discover those unpleasant reminders that your unknown friends are in the habit of sending to you?"

"Everywhere. Here, in this room; in my bedroom; in the dining-room—although I have discovered their presence there only once. But there seems to be no general place for them to deposit their messages."

The detective examined the fastenings of the doors and windows.

He even studied with great care, and with his magnifying-glass, the woodwork around the casings, and the places around the locks and latches, and fastening of each one of these.

There was not a mark anywhere that he could discover, which indicated that any person had even made an attempt to enter the house by surreptitious means.

He sounded the walls for secret passages; he looked for concealed springs in the wainscoting, along the baseboards, and near the mantels.

He moved the furniture and pulled the pictures out from the walls, and looked behind them—all with no result whatever.

He went outside the house and made a tour of it, passing all the way around, and examining each foot of ground as he passed over it—but he found no trace of anything whatever that was suspicious.

He reentered the house and went into the cellar, where, with his strong light, he inspected each beam, and the floor over his head. He looked at the walls of the foundations—he examined everywhere and everything—and always without result of any kind.

He climbed to the second floor and subjected that to as careful an examination as he had devoted to the other parts of the house—and always with the same result.

He even went into the low attic over that story of the house—and found only a mass of cobwebs, which told him that nothing had disturbed the place for years.

When, at last, this examination was completed and he returned to the library, where only the single case of new books bore out the reputation of the room, he dropped into a chair in juxtaposition with his client, and remarked:

"It will soon be dark now."

"Yes; it is nearly so, now."

"I see that you have had electricity put in the house since you have moved in here."

"Yes; I like it better than gas. It is handier, and one can dispense with matches."

"You do not smoke?"

"No."

"I hope you do not mind if I light a cigar. I find that there are times when one is a great help to me."

"Not at all. Smoke all you like."

"Thank you. Where are those two servants of yours? Will you call them, please?"

Colonel Pearsall rose and pressed a button in one of the walls, and after a little, one of the Celestials came noiselessly through a door into the room.

The detective signed to Pearsall to remain silent, and himself at once addressed the Chinaman in his own language; at which the fellow showed immediate delight.

The detective asked him his name, and told him to call the other servant; and then, when the two were before him, he began at once to question them.

Translated into English, the conversation that ensued, was as follows:

"What do you know about this gentleman who employs you?"

"Nothing; only that he came and engaged us to work for him?"

"Is he a satisfactory employer?"

"Yes."

"Do you like him?"

"Yes."

"Does he ever have company?"

"No."

"Has anybody at all visited him since you have been in his employ?"

"No."

"Has there never been a caller at all?"

"Never."

"Does not the postman come here?"

"Not at all."

"Nor the telegraph boy?"

"Nobody."

"Has the front door-bell never rang at all since you have been here?"

"Never."

"How does your employer occupy himself during the day?"

"He sleeps late in the morning. He eats his breakfast. He comes into this room and reads. He has a pot of strong coffee brought to him after his breakfast, and he drinks it all before we prepare the next meal."

"What time is that?"

"At three in the afternoon; he has his dinner."

"Does he eat much."

"At that meal, yes. Not at other times."

"What does he do after dinner?"

"Sometimes he remains in this room; sometimes he goes out for a walk."

"And when does he return?"

"He is always here before it is dark outside."

"What does he do then?"

"He rings the bell, and I reply. He orders whisky, and I bring it. Then he remains here until I serve his third meal."

"What time is that?"

"At nine in the evening."

"What does he take at that meal?"

"Toast, tea, and a chop. After that I leave the whisky bottle on the table, and in the morning it is always empty."

"Do you see him again after that?"

"Never—until the next morning."

"What do you and your companion do after that?"

"Sometimes we go to bed. Sometimes we go out together."

"Does your employer know that you go out?"

"I don't know. There is nothing to do. We have Chinese friends in the city. We go to see them."

"What time do you get back here, as a rule?"

"Sometimes, ten; sometimes, eleven; sometimes, twelve, one, two, three, four—any time, so that we are here in the morning."

"How do you enter the house when you return."

"Through the door to the kitchen. We carry the key away with us."

"Have you ever noticed that there is a light in the house when you have returned to it?"

"Very often. Almost always."

"Where, usually, is that light? In what room?"

"Sometimes in this room; sometimes in the room where he sleeps."

"And in other rooms as well?"

"No; not in the other rooms."

"Have you ever heard voices in any of these rooms at night?"

"Never."

"Or any sounds at all?"

"No."

"Have you ever found letters lying upon the table or anywhere, when you have returned, after being out, or in the morning when you have entered the dining-room to lay the table for a meal?"

"No."

"Or any parcel or package?

"No."

"That will do now. If your employer should ask you at any time what we have been talking about, you will tell him anything you please, except that we have been talking about him."

"Yes."

"I may wish to ask you more questions later. You will be ready to answer them?"

"Yes."

"You may both return to the kitchen now."

The moment they had withdrawn, Colonel Pearsall, who had remained an interested listener to all this, although without understanding a word of it, turned abruptly to the detective.

"Will you be good enough to tell me what the devil you have been talking about with those heathen?" he demanded tartly.

"I have been endeavoring," replied the detective calmly, "to induce them to tell me their histories. It is as well to be positive at the start, that neither of them have anything to do with this affair that is puzzling us."

"And are you convinced?"

"Quite. And now there is one thing that I wish you to do, colonel."

"What is that, sir?"

"I wish you to give me the entire freedom of this house to-night; and to do that, I wish you to leave it for the night. To leave me here. You can go to a hotel for the night; but whatever you do, I wish to be left here alone, till morning."

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER REFUSES A CASE.

During a full minute after the detective ceased speaking, his client remained quite silent and still in his chair, staring at him; and while the hiatus lasted, Nick Carter noticed—with more interest than amazement—that an expression of strange intensity gradually became more and more prominent in the man's eyes.

Already Nick had remarked a suggestion of this expression several times; but each time he had done so it

had come and gone, apparently, all in the same instant, and he had not been able to study it.

Now, however, it remained; and it dilated the pupils of the eyes, while the iris seemed, by proportion, to be come smaller.

In the interest that the detective felt in the study of this expression, and in the attitude of the man, he almost forgot the silence that had endured since his request.

But, after a little, Pearsall suddenly blurted out, as if the words had all the time been struggling to reach the surface, and had only just got there:

"Why? Why?"

It will be remembered that these words were in reply to the request of the detective to be left alone in the house for the night; a request which it was evident, had not struck the recipient of it with favor.

"Why?" repeated Pearsall again, after a second more. "Why is it that you do not want me here with you?"

"There is no reason at all, save that I would rather work entirely alone," replied Nick; and then he was startled by the quiet response to that remark.

"I don't believe you," said Colonel Pearsall.

Nick left his chair without a word.

He reached for his hat, which rested upon a small table at one side of the room, and having secured it, started for the door.

But he had not taken three steps before Pearsall bounded to his feet and confronted him.

"Where are you going?" he demanded; and now there was an angry curl around his lips, which unpleasantly suggested the expression of a snarling dog.

At the same time, he was bent a little forward, and his face was thrown out toward Nick, while his eyes blazed with ill-suppressed fury.

It was a strange attitude for the man to assume; and stranger expression of the face.

Somehow, in that instant, the whole bearing of the man suggested things to Nick that he had read as a child—and feared—human vampires.

He could not have told why the memory of those old childish fears came back to him at that instant, but there was no doubt that they did so.

Nick Carter's reply to the abrupt question was characteristic.

He did not like the attitude of the man; he did not like the manner of the question, and less than all, did he intend to accept, without profest, that other remark that he was not believed.

Pearsall had pursed his lips in readiness to repeat the question, when Nick Carter delivered himself of his reply—and as has been already said, it was characteristic.

Instead of replying in words, he started forward so that he could reach the man; and, when he was near enough, his arms shot out, and he caught the fellow by either shoulder.

Then, before the colonel had the least idea of his intentions, the detective had whirled him around and had sent him spinning across the floor toward the chair he had so lately vacated, with the result that Colonel Pearsall found himself seated there again before he realized fully what had happened.

And, in the meantime, the detective had quietly proceeded toward the door.

As he reached forward and turned the knob, and was about to pull the door open, the colonel again sprang to his feet, and this time the detective heard something very like an angry snarl escape from him.

But Nick wheeled in his tracks.

He did not wait to be attacked; but, instead, he faced the man, who stopped half-way across the floor, and began to chew his mustache in vexation.

"If you attempt any more of your theatricals upon me," said the detective, in a manner which evidently convinced his hearer that he meant what he said, "I will not be so gentle the next time I put you in your chair. I'll drive you down into it head first."

He turned about again, then; but the voice of his erstwhile client stopped him.

"Wait, Mr. Carter, wait, I beg of you!" he implored; and there was unmistakable sincerity in his tones.

"For what?" asked Nick, turning once more.

"Let me apologize to you, sir?"

"For what?"

"For saying what I did. For acting in the manner I did."

"Very well. Let it go at that."

"And you will remain, and——"

"No; I will not remain. I have done with your case—and with you, sir."

"But, Mr. Carter——"

"That is final, Colonel Pearsall—if you are Colonel Pearsall, which I begin to doubt."

"What do you mean, sir?" The man drew himself up haughtily.

"I mean merely that I think you are a practical joker, and that it pleased you to attempt to make me the victim of one of your pleasantries. I don't propose to be a willing victim to any such sort of thing. That is all."

"It is no joke, sir, I assure you."

"It certainly will not be if you attempt to carry it any further."

"Please remain. I beg of you to remain and take the case, as you agreed to do."

"No," said Nick. "I am going to leave you at once."

"Is there nothing that I can say that will induce you to change your mind?"

"Nothing."

The man burst into an unpleasant laugh.

"You are afraid! Is that it?" he demanded impudently.

"Possibly," replied Nick. He did not regard the imputation as worthy of denial.

"Ah! Pardon me again. I did not mean that. You will go now, but you will return again to-morrow, after you have thought this all over. You will return to-morrow, and take my case?"

"I doubt it," said Nick.

"Please. I implore you to do so."

"At least, I intend to leave you now," said the detective. "As for the request to come to-morrow—I will see about that when to-morrow is here."

"But—wait, sir, just one moment more. Is this all because I thought it strange that you should ask to be left alone in the house to-night?"

"Not entirely. You may regard that as part of it if you like."

"And because you do not entirely accept my apology for my hasty utterance."

"You may call that another part of it."

"And is not that all there is?"

"No; there are many other things. There are other detectives in the city. You might apply to some of them——"

"But I do not want any of them. I want you—*you*."

"That was exactly what I had begun to expect; and—you don't get me. Is that sufficiently plain?"

But the man still pleaded.

Nick could almost fancy that he saw tears in his eyes as he came another step nearer, and having clasped his hands together, continued:

"Promise me, Mr. Carter, that you will not entirely desert me. Think how I am situated in this house. At any moment I may be murdered in my sleep—or stabbed from behind—or otherwise be stricken down by an unseen foe, and myself be made to supply the hideous human particles that they use as warnings."

The detective shook his head; and now the man tried another tack.

"Ah!" he cried, as if with sudden enlightenment. "I have to thank those Chinamen for this, perhaps. I do not know what you said to them or what they said to you; but it is evident that they have said something which has been the principal cause for your present action."

"No," replied Nick. "But what is the use of further argument?"

"Promise me one thing, Mr. Carter, and I will let you leave me without another word of protest."

"Well, what is it?"

"Promise me that you will come here again to-morrow; that you will reconsider what you have said, or that, at least, you will come here again to tell me that you will not do so."

"Oh, well," said the detective, as if he relented somewhat from the position he had taken, "there is no reason why I should not drop in here to-morrow again. I will do that much."

"At what time, Mr. Carter? At what time?" and the man began to rub his hands together, and once more his eyes glistened with that strange fire as he asked the question twice.

"In the morning," replied the detective, as if casually. "I will have more time in the morning. I will come here about half-past ten o'clock."

"Ah! Thank you—thank you! And you will have reconsidered your determination by that time. You will again consent to take the case."

"No," said Nick, and he smiled rather coldly. (If you, reader had been watching Nick Carter at that moment, you would have known that he had some ulterior reason for acting as he did—a reason that did not appear on the surface.) "I will call here to see if you are still alive, and, if so, if there have been any more ears and noses, or fingers or toes left with you during the night; that is all."

"But you will come? You will come?"

"Yes; I will come."

"At half-past ten in the morning?"

"At half-past ten in the morning; yes."

"Without fail?"

"Without fail."

"Perhaps you will breakfast with me. That is near the hour of my breakfast. I usually have it at eleven. Will you take breakfast with me?"

"I don't think that I can promise you that much. I will have had my breakfast at a much earlier hour."

"Nevertheless, you will not fail me, will you?"

"No; I will be here."

"Then that is understood, is it not?"

"It seems to me that it has been understood now, several times."

"Ah! I do not mean to be so importunate; but I have been so unfortunate as to offend you and I am beside myself with remorse about it. Just at the moment when I believed that I could cast my burdens off onto your shoulders; just at the moment when I feel that I have a man near me who will explain all this terrible mystery, I must needs be so foolish as to say and do things which offend him, and which despoil me of the opportunity to employ the greatest detective in the world."

The detective shrugged his shoulders. He did not at all relish this sort of thing.

"Give me one more hope, Mr. Carter," pleaded the man. "Tell me this: That you will not make your final decision until you have seen me to-morrow. Say that you will give me your final answer then, even if you already know what it will be."

"Very well, have it so if you insist."

"You agree?"

"Yes; I agree."

"Ah! Then there is still hope that you will change your mind in my favor. I will not despair. I will take hope of that; I will look forward to the meeting with the prayer that you will have changed your mind, and that you will still be willing to serve me."

"Good night," said Nick.

"Good night," returned Colonel Pearsall, and the detective went outside, and presently was whirled away in his motor-car.

CHAPTER V.

THE TESTIMONY OF SEVERED FINGERS.

"Chick," said the detective, "I wish you would come up to the study with me for a little while."

The remark was called through the door into the library of the detective's home, as he entered it after his return from the interview with Colonel Pearsall, that we have already witnessed; and it was about half-past eight o'clock in the evening.

The chief assistant rose obediently, put down a book he had been reading, and followed his chief up the stairs.

"I am sorry that you weren't in the house when a chap who gave the name of Colonel Pearsall, called this afternoon," said the detective, as soon as they were seated. "I wish that you could have seen him."

"I did see him," replied Chick. "I was in the house. I thought you knew it."

"No; I did not notice. Well, all the better. Where were you?"

"In the little watch-room off the library."

"Ah! Then you did see him, and also you heard all that passed between us."

"Yes; everything, up to the time you left the house."

"Good! I am glad of it. Tell me what you think about the man, Chick."

"That was rather a wonderful story he told to you, wasn't it?"

"Never mind the story. What did you think of the man?"

"To tell you the truth, I did not know what to think about him."

"Just what do you mean by that reply?"

Chick was silent for a moment—and thoughtful; then he replied:

"I don't think that I mean very much, at the best, Nick. I thought he was a little on the queer; but then there are lots of men that way now. I will confess that I was curious to know what you found out when you got to his house."

"Tell me this, Chick: Did it occur to you at all that the fellow might be off his nut? Did it strike you that he had wheels? Did you think that he was woozy, or bughouse, or daffy, or loco, or—well, would any one of the many terms which apply to mental derelicts fit this particular case, in your estimation?"

"Your question seems to cover the ground," smiled Chick.

"I intended that it should. Now, answer it."

"Well, it was this way about him, with me. I thought at first—that is, when he coughed up that moth-eaten ear and laid it on your lap, that he was stark, staring, raving mad—that is, all but the raving; and I expected that to break out at any minute. You thought it was part of a hoax, but at that moment I believed the fellow to be bughouse."

"You did, really?"

"I did, really."

"And did you alter your opinion later on?"

"Not entirely. There were other things about him that supported that first opinion."

"What, for instance?"

"I caught, through the peep-holes, two or three glints of his eyes that were not reassuring, to say the least."

"Yes. I did that, too. But you might have seen some expressions that I did not catch. He did not know that there was another pair of eyes watching him."

"I think I did catch an expression now and then which escaped you."

"And when I went away with him, were you convinced that I had gone in the company of a lunatic?"

"No; not by any means. I only thought that the man was queer."

"Well, he's queer all right; about the queerest chap that I ever had to do with. If he is not as crazy as a bedbug at times, I'll eat my old hat."

"You think so, do you?"

"Think so? I almost know it. He came within an ace of having a paroxysm while I was in his company. How he managed to control himself, I don't know—but he didn't quite go off the handle, and, to tell you the truth, he didn't go far enough to make me feel thoroughly certain that I am right."

"What about the case itself, leaving the man out of the question?"

"That is another puzzle. I don't know whether to believe the fellow or not."

"Then why didn't you remain in the house overnight, to find out?"

Nick smiled broadly.

"There were several reasons why I did not remain," he replied. "One of them was that I had decided to return there without his knowledge, or to send you."

"I'll go if you will give me the chance. I would like nothing better. You had that last case—that supposed haunted house mystery—all to yourself. You might as well send me on this one."

"I thought that perhaps we might both go."

"All the better."

"And when I was going through the house on my

examination, I purposely left the way clear for us to get into the house if we chose to do so."

"Then that part of it would be easy."

"Yes; unless the old chap makes a tour of the house after me and finds that I did leave a way open. In that case——"

"Well, in that case—what?"

"It would be just like him to lie in wait at that very spot and to send a bullet through either one of us who first attempted the entrance by that means."

"I hadn't thought of that."

"Say, Chick!"

"Well?"

"Once or twice, while he was talking—I mean when he first began to talk, and while he was down-stairs in the library with me—I thought there was something familiar about his voice. Did anything of the kind occur to you?"

The assistant shook his head.

"Not a thing," he replied.

"You noticed nothing familiar about it?"

"Not a thing."

"I did not notice it, either, after awhile. It was only when he first began to talk. I suppose there was a resemblance in the voice to one that I have heard somewhere. There certainly is not a feature about that man which suggests anybody that I ever saw before."

"And there was no make-up about it, either."

"Not a bit. His face was as natural as could be."

"Only surprisingly pale and white."

"Yes; but the pallor is natural."

"I wasn't very close to him, but it struck me that it might be a prison pallor."

"Not a bit of it!"

"You are satisfied of that?"

"Absolutely. The pallor, in his case, is constitutional, I am positive."

"The pallor of the insane, eh? Anemic."

"Yes."

"Well, Nick, are you going there to-night, or are you going to send me?"

"I think we will both go, Chick. I confess that I am curious about the whole affair."

"So am I."

"You see, I purposely got up a little quarrel with him and threw down his whole case, hard. When I did that, he pleaded with me, and I succeeded in drawing out from him one interesting fact, at least."

"What was that?"

"That he wanted me on the case—and me alone. No other detective need apply."

"Oho!"

"Looks a little bit muddy, doesn't it?"

"Yes; but not half so much like the work of a madman."

"That is what puzzles me all the more."

"If he is after you to get a chance to do you; if he wants to put you out of the way; if he is one of your old enemies, who fancies that he has got to be revenged upon Nick Carter, and is taking this method to get about it, he is hardly a crazy person."

"That is sure enough."

"Did he plead with you to retain the case?"

"Plead? I should say he did; and I finally promised to return there at half-past ten in the morning and to give him my final answer at that time."

"I see what you are at. Well?"

"And I thought that in the meantime you and I would go up there to-night, and find out just how he passes his time from midnight till morning. The knowledge about that might influence the answer I will give him at half-past ten in the morning."

Chick chuckled.

"The fellow keeps two Chinamen servants in the house with him," continued the detective.

"I heard him tell you that."

"I had him send for the servants, and when they appeared, before either of them could say or hear a word of English, I spoke to them in their own language."

"That was a good idea."

"It won them over in an instant. They were willing at once to tell me all they knew; but it was not that which attracted my attention, so much as another effect produced by the Chinese talk."

"What was that?"

"It made the colonel almost beside himself with anger. He could hardly control himself while that talk which he could not understand was going on. I watched him narrowly all the time, and I saw that more than once he was on the point of an interruption; but I managed each time to steer him clear of it."

"But it made him angry; eh?"

"Yes. His eyes burned and flashed. He looked from one Chinaman to the other, and then at me, and then back again toward the Chinamen. It was almost funny."

"What about those Chinamen, Nick? Are they a part of the game—if there is a game?"

"No; not at all."

"Speaking of a 'game'; do you suppose there is one?"

"I don't know, Chick. Of one thing I am certain. There is a nigger in the fence somewhere around there."

"That ear and finger and toe business doesn't sound real, does it?"

"No; it does not."

"Unless the old house has been a resort for some body-snatching doctors, who have used the place for a private dissecting hospital—eh?"

"I thought of that; but I don't think it is the answer."

"Then where do the bits of human bodies come from?"

"We'll have to give that up for the present, Chick."

"One doesn't find that sort of thing lying around loose along the streets, Nick."

"Not exactly."

"And people cannot very well use them unless there is a human body somewhere to supply them. By the way, did you see anything more of the kind, than that ear that he exhibited during the time he was here?"

"Yes, I did, Chick. That is the greatest puzzle of all, and that is the fact that upsets all my other theories. While I was searching the grounds outside the house, I went out to the old barn, and there, near it, I found a spot where the ground had been disturbed. It did not take me long to dig it up, and there I discovered two fingers and another ear; and the surprising thing about that find was, that the ear was not a mate to the one that had been shown to me, and the two fingers I found could never have been taken from the same body."

The two detectives stared at each other in silence after that. There was no apparent method of explaining it along the lines of the suggestions already made by Nick. It seemed, in fact, to bear witness that the client had told the truth.

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER'S QUEER MOVE.

What might have happened had Nick Carter, or Chick, gone to the house on Washington Heights that night, to investigate conditions there on their own account, will never be known.

Fate decreed differently, however; and in so doing, wrapped the proceedings in the case in an additional cloak of mystery.

This, we shall presently discover.

Very little things often exert so great an influence upon more important affairs, as to turn them entirely in another direction. A mud worm, in working its way through the earth around a mighty dam, will open the way to the destruction of millions of dollars' worth of labor, which occupied years in fulfilment.

As Nick Carter and his assistant were on the point of starting out on their proposed night excursion to the house of Colonel Pearsall, a telephone call summoned both of them to police headquarters on an important matter, and thus they had to be content to wait another day for developments in the case of the severed ear.

The subject of their call to the central office has nothing to do with this case.

It is sufficient to note here that they did not return to the home of the detective until near the hour of daylight in the morning, and then it was altogether too late to think of carrying out their original plan.

"I think," said the detective, as they entered the house together, "that, inasmuch as we have been switched off our regular course, we may as well get a little rest now. I am not due at Pearsall's house, according to the agreement, until half-past ten; and so, Chick, if you will be ready at ten sharp, we will go there together in the automobile."

And so they parted for some needed rest.

But as the clock announced the hour of ten in the morning, both descended the front steps of the house and climbed into the waiting machine, and in a moment more they were speeding up-town as fast as the law would permit them to travel through the streets of the city.

The hillside upon which the house was situated was so steep that Nick stopped his machine just before he reached the top; then, together, they left it and proceeded to the old house.

Entrance had been made at the front door when Nick was there the preceding day, and so now they approached that quarter and rang the bell.

They waited a long time without receiving any reply to their summons; and then, somewhat impatiently, they rang again.

No response was forthcoming, and, at last, the detective rang peal after peal on the bell; but always with the same result; there was no evidence of life in or about the house.

The two detectives looked at each other inquiringly.

"Huh!" grunted the detective, with something very nearly approaching disgust, "I wonder if I have been all wrong from the start, and if I went away from here last night simply to open the way for the murder of Colonel Pearsall?"

"Possibly he has concluded to light out, and has run away and left the whole shooting-match," suggested Chick; but the detective shook his head.

"I hardly think that," he said. "At the same instant he grasped the knob of the door and turned it, only to find that it was securely fastened on the inside.

"Try that side door, Chick," he ordered. "In the meantime I will go around to the back of the house."

He listened again at the door for a moment, but as no sound came from within, he turned away and followed Chick toward the side door.

That also was locked, and so they went to the rear of the house, where they presently discovered that the same conditions prevailed.

"Where is that place that you spoke about? The one that you fixed so we could get into the house last night?" asked Chick.

"Here," replied the detective. "That small square window over the pantry. See it?"

They found it as Nick had purposely left it, and were not long in gaining admittance to the house after that.

It admitted them to a large pantry, which was separated from the kitchen by a wide entry.

Nick crossed this, with Chick following him closely, and they entered the kitchen together.

One glance around the place was sufficient to convince them that all was not right within the house.

The kitchen was absolutely in order, but the fire in the range had gone out, and there was the palpable suggestion there that not a living person had entered the room since the preceding night.

"It looks mightily as if they had all skipped out," was Chick's comment.

Nick made no reply; but he turned and led the way toward the front of the house—toward that room which had been named a library.

There was a lesser room—a sort of a storeroom which intervened before they reached the dining-room, and they would be obliged to cross that before they could enter the library.

Nick was in advance.

He arrived at the door which opened into the dining-room, and threw it open; and then they both discovered why it was that the Chinese servants had not responded to the summonses at the door-bell.

They were both there, in the dining-room—and both were stone-dead.

Indeed, their appearance showed that they had been dead many hours.

Both had been stabbed to death from behind; both had rude swathings of table linen wrapped around their heads and faces; each one of them had lost two fingers from their right hands—and when the bandages were removed from their heads, it was found that they had been also deprived of their ears.

"Ugh!" grumbled the detective, turning away. "It begins to look like serious business, Chick."

"I should say so."

"If we find that the colonel has been served in the same manner as these poor fellows, I shall feel almost as if it were my fault for not remaining here last night."

"There is no use in counting chickens until they're hatched," was the sententious reply of the assistant.

Without further remark, Nick pushed open the door which communicated with the library.

In this room the blinds at the windows had been closed, and the shades had been drawn, so that it was a moment before either of the detectives could discern objects distinctly; but they became conscious at the same instant, that there was an object seated in the great easy chair near the chimney; that the object was a man; and that the man was bound fast to the chair—and gagged as well.

The detective recalled the fact that the house was plentifully supplied with electric lights, and he quickly turned on a switch, flooding the room with illumination.

It was Colonel Pearsall who was seated in the chair.

His eyes were wide open and staring at them; his jaws had been pried apart, and wedged between them was a short stick which had been wound with a handkerchief, to serve as a gag.

To each end of the stick was fastened a strap, and this was brought around behind his head and buckled there so tightly that the man's face was drawn out of shape, and it must have been very painful.

To the top of the chair, on one side, was fastened a stout, but slender, cord, and this had been taken around and fastened to the opposite side of the frame-work of the chair, but in such a way that it exactly crossed the man's throat where his Adam's apple was located, and thus its position rendered it impossible for him to raise his head at all.

His ankles were tied together tightly, and from each one of them a piece of rope led to the legs of the chair and were fastened there, so that he could not move either foot more than an inch or two.

The same unique ingenuity had been used in fastening his hands in such a manner that they would be utterly useless; and Nick was rather surprised, in this instance, to discover that ordinary steel handcuffs had been used.

There were two pairs of them—one for each wrist; that is, for the right arm, one-half of the handcuff had been snapped upon the wrist and the other half fastened in the same manner to the spindles in the arm of the chair; and the left arm had been served in precisely the same manner.

So, now, we see the entire picture—and it is necessary that we should do so in order to follow this strange incident to a consecutive end.

Picture to yourself a large chair with a man seated in it. To each of the front legs, a rope binds his ankles, after they have been tightly bound together; a gag is in his mouth; a cord is stretched from side to side across his windpipe, so that he cannot raise his head, and each of his arms are fastened as already described, to the arms of the chair.

The detectives lost no time in freeing the man from his unpleasant position.

Their first act was to remove the gag and to sever the cord which passed across his throat; but when they had entirely liberated him, and had helped him to stand upon his feet, he collapsed utterly and would have fallen to the floor, had not Nick Carter caught him and led him tenderly to the sofa.

It was some time before Colonel Pearsall could talk to them at all about what had happened in the house; but there was a bottle of whisky on the table, and after he had been helped rather generously to that, he began to revive, and in half-an-hour he was comparatively himself again.

Until then Nick had resisted every effort he made to relate what had taken place.

"Don't try to tell me your story until you can tell it all," he said to the colonel. "I want to hear it con-

secutively, from beginning to end, if possible. In the meantime you can take another drink and keep silent while I look about me a bit."

The "looking about" consisted in the detective's returning to the dining-room, where the bodies of the two Chinamen had been mutilated; and when Chick would have followed him, he told him that he had better remain with the colonel, who might require added attention.

In the dining-room the detective turned on the electric lights and produced his magnifying-glass.

The most innocent-looking rugs and carpets will often have tales of their own to tell, if one only knows how to dig for them—and this sort of digging was Nick Carter's specialty, as we happen to know.

If a stranger had been peering through the blinds into that room just then, he would have seen the detective get down on his knees on the floor and, with his glass, seem to study the threads of the heavy rug.

He would have seen him dart hither and thither across the room, from side to side, now and then pausing for several seconds in one spot, then for a longer time in another; he would have seen him devote a considerable time to the examination of the bodies themselves, and, finally, he might have been rather surprised at one startling thing that the detective did.

In the entry between that room and the one back of it, which has already been mentioned, there was a stairway—the back stairs of the house—leading to the upper floor.

Nick had noticed this in passing through toward the dining-room and library—and now, the strange and seemingly incomprehensible thing he did, was to pick up in his arms the body of one of the Chinamen, and to carry it softly and noiselessly from the dining-room into the entry and up the stairs to the second floor, where he quickly found a room in which he left it. Then he returned to the dining-room.

Here he stopped to the door and motioned to Chick—and, standing back so that Pearsall could not see him, he touched his fingers to his lips and then passed on into the library.

Pearsall would have begun the recital of the story then, but Nick interrupted him.

"Wait," he said. "I am not quite ready to hear you yet."

Then, while Pearsall could look on at what he did, he carefully went over this room with his magnifying glass, almost in the same manner as he had done in the dining-room; only an observer would have noticed that he did not exert the same care here, as there.

But he ceased suddenly in this examination, and turning to Pearsall, said:

"Now, Colonel Pearsall, if you are ready——"

CHAPTER VII.

THE TERRIBLE EXPERIENCES OF PEARSALL.

"I hardly know how to relate to you the terrible experiences through which I have passed since you went away from this house, last night, Mr. Carter," Pearsall began. "It seems too terrible to contemplate."

"And yet," replied Nick, "it seems quite necessary that I should hear all about it."

"May I ask a question, first?"

"Certainly."

"Did you come here this morning intending to resume charge of the case, or had you determined to abandon it, as you said last night that you would do?"

"I intended to take up the case again," replied Nick calmly, and with the suggestion of a smile around the corners of his mouth. "I shall follow it now to the end, until the entire fabric of mystery is uncovered, and you and I and the world know all about it."

"Thank you, Mr. Carter. That relieves my mind greatly."

Pearsall's tone was almost monotonous in its impassibility, and there was not even a suggestion of expression of any kind upon his countenance.

His entire air was one of utter weariness, lassitude, negativeness.

"Tell me now," said the detective, "what happened, how it happened, and when it happened."

The man shuddered; and then, after a moment, he said:

"I was seated in that chair when I was attacked."

"What time of night was that? For I conclude that you were attacked sometime during the early part of the night, and before you thought of retiring."

"In the first place, Mr. Carter, you must understand that my habits are what you might call those of a night-owl. I sit up very late. It has always been my habit. I read. I smoke. I meditate. I prefer the silent hours of the night to the noisy ones of the day."

"Yes; go on."

"I think it was somewhere about two o'clock in the morning when I was disturbed——"

"And how were you first disturbed? How were you first apprised of the presence of others near you?"

"I was seized from behind, and held."

"Just tell me the main points of the story as clearly as you can."

"I was seated in that chair, as I have already said. My back was toward the mantel, and the clock, which explains why I do not know the exact time."

"Yes."

"About half-an-hour before I had done an unusual thing for me—I had rung for my servant, for I discovered that the whisky was out, and I wanted more. I did not know but that they had gone to bed, but, nevertheless,

I rang, and was agreeably surprised to be answered at once."

"By one or both of the servants?"

"By one of them. The one who waits upon this part of the house. The other is cook."

"Yes."

"When he came in, I told him that I wanted whisky. He brought it without a word, and as he was leaving the room, I told him that he could go to bed as I should not need him again."

"Yes."

"I mixed myself a drink of sugar and water and whisky, and was sipping it leisurely, and had almost finished the glassful, when, without a sound to apprise me of what was coming, I was seized from behind.

"Two hands were locked together around my throat, holding my head back against the cushions of the chair, and at the same time a cloth was thrown over my eyes, so that I could see nothing.

"I struggled, of course, but without avail, for others seized me by the legs, and in a very few minutes I was bound to the chair, just as you found me when you entered the room.

"That is, my legs were tied to the chair as you found them, and the irons were placed on my wrists and fastened to the arms of the chair. And then the cord was passed across my throat and made fast on either side, so that I could not raise my head."

"But it was not tight enough to interfere with your breathing, eh?"

"No; nor with talking. It was just close enough to my throat so that I could not raise my head from the cushions of the chair at all. I made the effort, and, perceiving that I was helpless, I resigned myself to my fate."

"And then——?"

"Then the bandage was taken from my eyes. That is, it was not a bandage, in the true sense of the word; it was simply a cloth thrown over my eyes, so that I was prevented from seeing until it was removed."

"I understand."

"When it was taken away, I could see nothing at all."

"What? Do you mean that you had somehow been blinded?"

"No, no! I mean that I seemed to be alone in the room. I had been attacked. I had felt myself seized and held fast, while I was bound. I had heard the movement of two, or possibly three or four, persons around me. I was fastened to the chair so that I could not move. But now, that the thing was done, it seemed as if it might have been all a dream for all the evidence of the presence of others that I could discern around me."

"Go on."

"The gag had not yet been placed in my mouth, and so after a moment passed in thinking what I should do—and I wish you to understand that during every second of that time I expected to feel a knife in my vitals, or to have an ear or a finger severed from my living body—I spoke aloud.

"'Who is there?' I demanded, in a voice that sounded unlike my own, but which I tried to render as calm as possible.

"I thought—I only thought, for I was not at all sure—that I heard a low chuckle from somewhere behind me, and after waiting a moment, I said:

"'For God's sake speak to me, whoever you are!'

"This time there was no doubt about the chuckle; and in a moment it was followed by a voice which commanded me sternly to be silent.

"Well, I obeyed. There was nothing else for me to do; but, after another interval of silence that was almost unbearable, I could stand it no longer, and I decided that I would about as soon be murdered at once as to be compelled to sit there and suffer all the tortures of anticipated butchery; so I spoke again.

"'Who are you?' I demanded, in as stern a tone as I could assume; and this time, for response, I heard an unmistakable laugh.

"'You will find that out soon enough,' said a voice from directly behind me. 'We have warned you often enough of what you might expect if you continued to defy us, and now you must take the consequences.'

"'Am I to be killed without mercy?' I asked.

"'You are not to be killed at all, this time,' came the reply.

"I started to ask another question. I had opened my lips to speak, when I received a sharp blow across my mouth, which silenced me, and which made me so angry that I struggled again to rise. But the cord across my throat effectually held me where I was, and after a moment I sank back, exhausted.

"I heard a chorus of laughter then, as if the people who had attacked me were greatly amused; and then, without warning, three of them stepped directly in front of me, so that I could see them."

"Three?"

"Yes."

"Describe them."

"That is easily done, for they were all arrayed alike. There was no difference between any of them. Each one might have been either of the others. If they had stepped behind me and then reappeared one by one, I could not have determined which one reappeared first."

"Well?"

"Did you ever attend a sheet and pillow-case party, Mr. Carter? The question seems irrelevant at just this moment, but that sort of costume exactly describes the appearance of the three men who stood before me."

"They were wrapped in sheets and their heads were concealed in the folds of pillow-cases, eh?"

"Yes, sir. The sheets were swathed around their bodies so that they looked like pictures I have seen of desert Bedouins: The pillow-cases covered their heads and drooped to their shoulders. Above their heads they extended to points, and there had been holes cut in them through which I could see the eyes of the men shining malignantly upon me."

"What did they do when they stepped in front of you?"

"They stood there in line, like so many specters—and then I noticed that the sheet which covered one of them was smeared with blood. There was blood all over it."

"Indeed!" said the detective. "Where did it come from?"

"I did not know at that moment, but I was quickly to discover."

"Yes?"

"The man with the blood upon him stood in the middle between the other two; and those other two presently stepped aside and turned so that they faced him, and then they raised their hands and pointed silently toward the blood-stains.

"'Behold!' said one.

"'Beware!' said the other; and then they closed up again, and stood facing me.

"They were certainly theatrical, at least," remarked Chick, sotto voce; but Nick appeared not to notice the remark.

"What next?" he asked of Pearsall.

"'Your servants are already dead,' said the man in the middle, between the other two. 'We have killed them. We have cut their ears from their heads. We have severed fingers from their hands. Behold!' And then, Mr. Carter, he extended his right hand, while the remaining two did the same with their right hands, and in each hand was one of the fingers or the ears or two of them—I really don't know, for I was too greatly frightened to notice particularly."

"That is not to be wondered at—under the circumstances," said the detective, with a distinct note of sympathy in his voice. "What then?"

"Then, one by one, they moved over to that table—I see you have already inspected it and have discovered what it contains—and deposited the fingers and the ears on the table, after which they returned again to their former positions.

"I was trembling by this time, for I felt sure that my time had come; and one of the men, perceiving it, shook with laughter.

"'We are not going to hurt you—this time,' he said to me. His voice was cold and hard, but I fancied that there was a note of refinement in it. 'We are not going to hurt you—this time,' he repeated, 'but unless you have vacated this house within forty hours of the time we leave you, we will return again. And when we return, we will approach you as silently as we did this time. We will make you a prisoner, as we did this time. We will tie you in your chair, as we have done this time. Then, Colonel Pearsall, after we have done that, we will take you apart, piece by piece, just as one might take the works out of a clock. We will cut off your ears, we will sever your fingers from your hand, and your toes from your feet, all while you are still alive. We are surgeons, and we will do it scientifically. We will apply cocaine, so that you may not suffer overmuch, and in order that you may sit there, bound and helpless, and watch us while we are at work. And after we have amused ourselves with you to our heart's content, we will put an end to your misery.'

"He ceased, and he made a sign to the others.

"They stepped quickly behind me. The gag was thrust into my mouth and fastened there.

"My bonds were examined, as if to assure the men that they were secure.

"I heard the click of the electric switch, and the lights went out.

"I sat here in total darkness. I could hear no other sound than that I have described, and for a long time I did not know whether the men had gone away or not.

"Then, I think that I must have lapsed into unconsciousness, for all the rest of the night seems like a hideous dream.

"And that is all."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAIL OF MADNESS THROUGH A BRAIN.

The detective was silent for a moment, and then he remarked:

"It was rather fortunate for you that I promised to return here this morning; don't you agree with me?"

"Indeed, I do; otherwise, I might have starved to death. Nobody ever comes to this house."

"You might have perished in that chair without the power to relieve yourself."

"Yes, indeed. I thought of it many times while I awaited your coming."

"It was altogether a narrow escape, for I might not have come at all, you know."

"Oh, I thought of that many times."

"No doubt. And you were greatly relieved when you heard us ringing at the door?"

"I think, sir, that the sound of the ringing of the bell awakened me from a stupor into which I had fallen."

"You did not, of course, see the bodies of the two victims who suffered in your place?"

"The two Chinamen? No."

"You do not in reality know that they were murdered?"

"No; only from what was told me, and because of the

blood on the sheet of one of the men who stood in front of me, and who seemed to be the chief."

"You do not, in reality, know that either of them were killed, do you?"

"No; how should I? Only there are the ears, and the fingers. They tell a gruesome tale of their own."

"True; but a man might lose fingers and ears, and still live."

"That is so. However, I think that the two men are dead. Have you not discovered their bodies?"

Nick Carter chose, for some reason of his own, not to heed this question, but continued to ask others.

"Do you know where the murderers left the bodies of their victims?" he asked.

"I think, in the dining-room."

"Why do you think that?"

"I only guessed it; and, besides, after the men were gone, I remembered to have heard some slight noises out there just before I was attacked. I thought nothing of them at the time, but, afterward, it occurred to me that they were made by the assassins."

"Step this way!" said the detective; and he rose and threw open the door into the dining-room.

Pearsall followed him to the door, and then he stopped suddenly in his tracks.

"Why!" he exclaimed. "There is only one! Where is the other?"

"Where, indeed?" repeated Nick, after him, and watching him narrowly all the time.

"There should be two, shouldn't there?" asked Pearsall lamely.

"If they killed both of the Chinamen, there should be two bodies here," replied the detective; "but there appears to be only one. Perhaps the other one was not killed. Perhaps he was permitted to escape; or, if not that, it might be that he was not so seriously wounded as the man who attacked him believed he was. He might have recovered sufficiently to drag himself out of the house. In a word, Chinamen are sometimes as difficult to kill as cats, and he may have made his escape, and have found his way to the police station, where he has already told his story about all the horrible things that happened in this house last night."

Pearsall stared, with horror-stricken eyes, directly in front of him, and Nick Carter noticed that his eyes were fixed upon the exact spot where the missing body of the Chinaman had been before the detective removed it from the room.

"Do you think it possible?" Pearsall breathed in a half whisper.

"It seems quite probable," replied the detective.

"No, no! No! I think that you will find his body somewhere else about the house. He might have dragged himself away to a considerable distance, but it is not possible that he could have lived to get entirely away."

Nick permitted him to go on without interruption, for he confessed himself intensely interested in what Pearsall was saying; but when the other ceased speaking, he remarked:

"You seem to be quite certain of that, Colonel Pearsall."

"Let us look!" was the reply; and Pearsall moved toward the door.

"Wait," said the detective. "We will search for the other body later. I wish first to obtain some more of the particulars about those three men who attacked you."

"Really, Mr. Carter, I have told you quite all I know already."

"Come back with me into the library. Thank you. Let us be seated again. We have the entire day before us. Now, have you any idea how those three men entered or left this house?"

"Not any at all."

"Would you recognize the voice of any one of them should you hear it again?"

"I hardly think so."

"What do you propose to do now, concerning their warning?"

"Their warning to leave this house? For me to leave it at once, you mean?"

"Yes; I think you said that they gave you forty hours in which to get out."

"Yes; that was it; forty hours."

"What are you going to do about it? Are you going to get out?"

"*No!*"

Pearsall's jaws shut together like a steel trap, and an expression of angry resolution came into his face.

"Do you mean that you will remain here and defy them to the last?"

"Yes."

"Taking all the chances of being murdered yourself, and after the manner so graphically described by them?"

"Yes."

"One might say that you are a brave man, Colonel Pearsall—or a very foolish one."

"I refuse to be driven out."

"What measures will you take to protect yourself?"

"I do not know—just yet."

"But, judging from the manner in which you were attacked; drawing conclusions from the utter silence with which they succeeded in approaching you, so that you were helpless in their power before you knew that they were anywhere near you, it seems to me that no matter what means you employ to protect yourself against them, they will succeed in approaching you at their pleasure, and that you must ultimately fall a victim to their ferocity."

"Nevertheless I shall fight them to the bitter end."

"You have no doubt that they are human beings, have you?"

"Human beings! I don't understand you at all."

"It has not occurred to you that they might be—er—ghosts, for instance."

Pearsall broke into a harsh laugh.

"I scarcely expected to hear such a question as that one from *you*," he said.

"Nor did I expect to ask it until it occurred to me at that moment. I did not know but that you might believe in ghosts, even if I did not—and I have heard of men who are pursued relentlessly by certain colors—have you not?"

"Certain colors?" A sneering smile played for an instant across the features of Pearsall; and he added the word: "Possibly."

"The combination of white and red, for instance," the detective continued imperturbably, and as if he were arguing an utterly abstruse proposition; but at the same instant he opened wide his coat and threw it back, disclosing, as he did so, a broad expanse of shirt bosom, against which reposed a flaming red tie.

The effect upon Pearsall was electrical.

His naturally pallid complexion faded to the color of chalk; his lips tightened over his teeth, and were drawn back just a little, with that snarling-dog expression that the detective had seen him exhibit once before; his eyes dilated, and the irises seemed at the same time to grow smaller—and then, as Nick rebuttoned his coat, the entire expression faded from his face, and the smile that had been there a moment before came back again.

The whole effect was much the same as that of a cloud passing between the sun and a patch of ground—and Nick Carter appeared to take no notice at all of what had happened.

The detective rose and took a turn around the room, as if he were considering another thought, and then he returned and seated himself again, near to Pearsall.

"While you were relating the incidents of last night to me," he said, "you mentioned one point that interested me. I want to ask you about it."

"Very well," was the calm reply.

"It was when the three men were threatening you with the mode of death they would inflict upon you if you did not heed their warning and leave this house."

"Yes?"

"They told you, in effect, that they would cut you up, piecemeal, before they finally arrived at the crucial point of taking your life, did they not?"

"Yes."

"And in telling you that, they also admitted that they were skilled surgeons. Did I not understand you so?"

"Yes."

"Has it not occurred to you that they were extremely foolish in admitting so much to you?"

"It was foolish of them; yes, I think it was."

"Quite so.

"The statement might afford us a clue to their identities. It would suggest, in a word, that they were physicians, who delight in surgical operations, in the dissection of subjects—and also in vivisection. What, by the way, do you think of vivisection? How do you regard it?"

The eyes of Pearsall glowed for an instant—and then dimmed again; but the fleeting expression was not lost upon the detective. He persisted:

"Do you view vivisection with the horror with which it impresses most people?"

Pearsall shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems to me, Mr. Carter," he said calmly, "that we are drifting very much away from our subject, are we not?"

"I don't know but we are; but, all the same, does it not occur to you that if we can discover a physician, or several of them, in this neighborhood, who delight in the practise of such horrors, that we would have in our hands a clue which might ultimately lead us to the arrest of the men who have tormented you—and who propose to torment you more, still?"

"That might be true."

"And now, Mr. Pearsall—excuse me—Colonel Pearsall, I am going to act in the capacity of physician for you, for a moment."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I think that you have been greatly overcome by all that you have passed through since I last saw you. You have had a terrible experience."

"That is true."

"And you have had no sleep. Now, outside, near the curb, is my automobile. My chauffeur is in charge of it, and I am going to send you to my house in order that you may take a little needed rest."

Pearsall half started to his feet, and then he sank back again, while he asked:

"And you? What do you intend to do in the meantime, Mr. Carter?"

"I shall send for the coroner—which is my duty; also the police. I will represent you in the matter, so that you need have no fear. They might suspect you of complicity here, if it were not that I could assure them of all I know about the case. At all events it is decidedly better that you should not be here when they arrive. I will have the house cleansed, and will have everything put to rights, and then, as soon as my official duties have been attended to, I will follow you to my house, where we will take measures at once for the final overcoming of these murderers. I hope that it all meets with your approval, for it certainly is the best thing to be done—and you need rest. Rest and sleep."

CHAPTER IX.

THE DETECTIVE'S WONDERFUL TACT.

"Now, what the devil——"

The verbal explosion came from Chick, and it was directed at his chief when Nick Carter returned from the street to the house, after having conducted Colonel Pearsall to the automobile, and seen him safely on his way to the enjoyment of rest and quiet, which he had been assured awaited him at the home of the detective.

But Nick held up one hand, and stopped the flow of language.

"Easy, Chick; easy," he said, smiling. "Don't go off half-cocked. One makes a miss-fire, sometimes, when that is done."

"Look here, Nick, I have followed you through a good many cases, and I have seen you resort to all sorts of expedients in order to carry a point, but just why you should indulge in all that tommyrot about colors, and red and white, and vivisection, and that infernal scoundrel's need of rest, is more than I can quite make out."

"He is not an infernal scoundrel at all, Chick."

"He's a murderer."

"What makes you think that?"

"Everything points to it."

"What points to it? Be more explicit."

"I can't. *Everything* points to it, but I don't know that I can put my finger on any one particular thing that would be conclusive."

"Exactly. And that is just the trouble."

"Can you?"

"Yes; at several things."

"You haven't any doubt that he killed the Chinamen himself, have you?"

"Not the slightest."

"Or that he tied himself up, in the manner we found him?"

"Not at all."

"Or that the story he told us about the men in sheets and pillow-cases was all a lie?"

"He thought it was the truth when he told it."

"That doesn't make any difference in the fact, does it?"

"It makes considerable difference in the effect of the fact, however."

"I couldn't, for the life of me, make out your reason for moving that corpse of the poor Chinaman up-stairs, when you did it."

"But you understand it now, don't you?"

"You wanted him to miss it from the place where he had left it, didn't you?"

"Yes; and that was the first real proof I had that my suspicions were correct."

"I suppose you mean when he stared so hard at the spot where the body had been before you took it away, don't you?"

"Yes; that and his insistence that the man could not have gone away himself."

"Well, Nick, that is all right, as far as it goes. But will you tell me what first put you on to the facts of the case? How was it that you first suspected that he had done the whole thing himself?"

"Well, Chick, it is only fair to tell you that I had about arrived at that decision before I left here last night. Have you, for instance, taken any notice of that single case of books, over there in the corner?"

"I have noticed that it is there."

"Is that all?"

"Practically. Some of the books seemed to have been thumbed a good deal."

"Haven't you looked at their titles?"

"I can't say that I have."

"You should have done that in the first place."

"Why?"

"Because there isn't a book there that is not a treatise upon some form of surgery; and they range, in comprehension of subject, all the way from mere dissection, to vivisection."

"By Jove, Nick!"

"So you see they were worth more than a glance from you, don't you?"

"I should say so."

"This is the man's library. Those are the books which make it a library. Those are the books which he sits here and studies night after night, when everybody else is in bed. Those are the books that he has dreamed over, and——"

"And gone mad over; eh?"

"Not a bit of it. He went mad, Chick, very long ago. He was studying for a physician when he lost his reason. He was taken to a private institution, and——"

"One would suppose that you already know who he is."

"I do know who he is."

"What?"

"It is true, Chick; or, rather, I should say that I have not the least doubt of his identity. I never saw him before, in a manner which would enable me to recognize him—but I had an opportunity to hear his voice once, under very peculiar circumstances."

"When, Nick? And where?"

"In that murder problem case. In the case which was brought to me by old Jeremy Jones."

"Great Scott! Do you mean that you suspect that this man, who calls himself Colonel Pearsall, is old Jeremy Jones' eldest son?"

"Yes. That is exactly what I mean. Don't you recall the circumstance? You remember how the old man had built a house for his other son—a house that was filled with secret passages and chambers? Don't you remember that this crazy son, who was supposed to be dead, had

in fact escaped long before that time from the asylum, and had been hanging around there ever since? Then he killed his father, after committing other murders, and finally he chained his brother and the coachman to a wall and set a dynamite charge to blow them to bits? You remember all that, don't you?"

"Yes; only I wasn't in the case, you will remember."

"You know when this man first came to me in his character as the colonel, I thought there was something familiar about his voice. I have nailed it now. I know whose voice it is.

"But that other time when I saw him, he was dressed like a clown in a circus. His face was covered with white enamel paint; there were red half-moons on his cheeks; his lips were as red as poppies; he wore a peaked white cap, like a clown's; he——"

"And all that gave you the idea about the red and white; eh?"

"Precisely. But let us get down to the facts of this case."

"I wish you would."

"When I came to this house yesterday and looked around it, especially on the outside, I knew at once that nobody had entered it as he said they had. The thing was impossible without having left behind some traces that I could find. I found none.

"My examination of the inside of the house told the same story. No stranger had forced his or her way into this house. It was impossible without leaving some trace of it.

"I looked for secret passages, secret closets, and all that; but the idea was not tenable at all. It was all out of the question.

"Face to face with the—to me—indisputable fact that nobody from the outside could have gotten into the house, I was naturally reduced to the only remaining solution of the problem; that is, that whatever had been done at all, had been done by some person inside the house.

"It didn't take me long to decide that neither of the Chinamen could be guilty—and then there was only one person left who might be—Pearsall himself.

"With this firmly in my mind, it all came to me as suddenly as light through darkness, that this man Pearsall was the escaped lunatic of the Jones family.

"At the time of his escape from me, the very last act he committed before he climbed through a trap in the ceiling of the false celler under that house, was to stab to death one of his companions—the only one, in fact, that he had had with him while he had been playing ghost all over the premises.

"That poor fellow was another escaped lunatic. He had been brought away from the asylum by the more cunning Jones, and had served him ever since. I learned that much in the investigation I made after the case was closed.

"But the thing about that incident which is important just now, is the manner in which the lunatic servant was stabbed; and if you had seen him, and now looked upon the bodies of these Chinaman, you would at once say that the hand that struck one of those three men, struck all of them.

"The blow, in each case, was delivered in the back, between the shoulders, and was downward so that it touched, if it did not pierce, the heart.

"Death in each case must have come almost instantly. It is a blow that has been carefully studied by the man who delivered it, and is based upon his anatomical knowledge, and that is why he was so ready to cry out that it was impossible for his victim—one of the Chinamen—to have left the spot where he fell.

"You saw how it excited him when I introduced the subject of vivisection; you perceived his appreciation of the fact that he had made a point against himself in suggesting to me in the story he told about the attack upon him, that his assailants were physicians.

"The man is only half mad—but that half of him is thoroughly mad."

"I guess there is no doubt about that," commented Chick.

"He is thoroughly mad on the subject that drove him insane—and that was the profession he was studying. I have no doubt that before that time there was a taint of madness in him, and that the sight of the colors of red and white, which he encountered in the dissecting-room, while in the pursuit of his studies, developed that taint into a certainty."

"Color madness. I have heard of it."

"It is about the most common of all forms of madness. Given a person whose reason is dethroned, and there is always some combination of colors which will bring about a paroxysm of their trouble. Any alienist will tell you that."

"And in this particular case it is red—in other words, blood."

"Not necessarily. It is red; but not 'in other words, blood,' as you put it. But the color of blood is red. He knows that, and when the red flames in his eyes, there is always one method by which he can satisfy his craving for it; and that is—murder."

"Will you tell me why you did not keep him here when you had him? Will you tell me why you did not place the irons on him at once, and have him conveyed to Bellevue, and from there to an asylum for the insane?"

"Because I believed the easiest way to be the best way. Because I am convinced that he will remain where he has been sent, and will rest and sleep.

"Take any maniac, and after he has passed through a paroxysm such as has been experienced by this man during the commission of the double murder, and the time he waited, in pain and suffering, for me to come here

and release him from the bonds he had fastened upon himself, the desire to rest and to sleep is almost overpowering.

"You might have noticed while I talked with him, that sometimes his face and eyes would be almost wholly without expression; at such times he was practically asleep. He is perectly harmless now, and he will remain so for a considerable time to come—at least, until he has rested, or until another combination of red and white is flashed unexpectedly in front of him.

"Also, I wished for an opportunity to examine this house thoroughly without the annoyance of his presence. I want to find the weapon with which he killed the Chinamen, and which he has cunningly concealed somewhere about here. I wish also to study how it was that he succeeded in fastening himself into the chair so perfectly that it was almost impossible to discover that he had done the act himself."

For a moment there was silence; and then:

"But suppose he does not go to your house? Suppose he takes a notion to leave the automobile before he gets there? Or to drive a knife into the chauffeur's back while he is on the way? Or to murder somebody after he gets there, and before either of us are on hand to prevent it? It seems to me, Nick, that you took great chances in sending him away as you did. That is the way it looks to me," insisted Chick.

CHAPTER X.

THE PROOFS OF THE CRIME.

The detective did not immediately reply to the expostulation of his assistant, but he sat silently in the chair, thinking deeply.

"I don't know, after all, but there are grounds for the fears you express, Chick," he said presently. "Still, the man is gone now. I have taken the chance, and must abide by it."

"Not necessarily. Let me go after them. I can get to the house now—by the subway—soon after they are due to arrive."

"Very well, Chick. Go ahead. I will follow, after a little. As you go, however, I wish you would stop at the corner long enough to telephone to the One Hundred and Fifty-second Street station-house and ask the sergeant in charge to send a couple of men down here. You might also request him to notify the coroner. It will save time and trouble for me."

Two minutes later, Nick Carter was alone in the house; but, nevertheless, he remained a long time seated in the chair where Chick had left him.

His right elbow rested upon one knee and his chin was buried in the palm of his hand—a favorite attitude with him when there were weighty matters on his mind.

But, at last, he roused himself suddenly, and started to his feet.

If you had been watching him then you would have guessed that whatever it was that he had been puzzling his brain about, that now it was settled in his own mind.

His first act when he rose to his feet was to go directly to the back part of the house, to climb the stairs and to return the body of the Chinaman to the place from which he had taken it.

During the inspection he had made of the room where the double crime was committed, which has already been described, his glass had told him almost all of the facts which we have heard him relate to Chick.

The rugs on the floors had assured him that no strangers had been present in that house.

The dust on the window-casings, along the mop boards and near the doors, had doubly assured him that no strangers had entered the house by surreptitious means.

Quite to the contrary he had found where Colonel Pearsall—as we have known the man in this story—had moved about in his own person.

The only active and effective enemy to the collection of dust, is woman. Where men live and women do not, dust will inevitably collect, and no masculine servant, however efficient, has ever been known utterly to conquer it.

There were no women in this house; there had been none—and dust had collected.

True, it had been wiped away in places where it was too apparent to the eye; but under the tables, where the feet of those who lived in the house never trod, there was dust.

Under the chairs, there was more. It was in all the places where it could find lodgment, without prominence; and in many of these it had a tale of its own to relate to the detective.

The table in the dining-room at which the colonel had been served with his meals, was a round one.

The chair in which the man had always seated himself at that table, faced the windows; and underneath the table, in front of that chair, were plainly to be seen, impressed upon the rug, the marks of his feet. These were not visible to the naked eye, but they were plainly in evidence under the detective's glass.

During his first inspection of that part of the room, the detective had noticed one impression upon the rug which he had not, at that time, taken the trouble or the time to study with unusual care; but now he returned to it.

He got down upon his knees and put his head and shoulders under the table.

Presently he withdrew them, procured a bit of paper and returned.

Then, with his pencil, he drew an outline on the paper, which, when he held it up, plainly revealed the shape of a dagger, with a cross-shaped hilt.

With the drawing in his hand, Nick stood up again and looked around the room.

He knew, now, almost the description of the weapon that had been used in killing the two Chinese servants, and he was asking himself where the crazy man could have hidden it after the commission of the crimes.

The cunning of a lunatic is proverbial.

The very lack of system in the application of his mental powers, seems to become his most powerful ally in the deception of the sane—and Nick Carter was trying to put himself in the crazy man's place, for a moment, in order to determine what cunning device the other had employed in concealing the dagger.

And then it occurred to him that there was another question to be answered first.

"How did the weapon happen to be dropped or thrown under the table so that it would leave its impression there for me to discover?"

That was the question he asked himself.

It seemed at first like a very unimportant question, at the best; but as the detective looked upon the bodies of the two victims of the tragedy, his eyes brightened.

In returning the corpse that he had moved, to the place where he had first discovered it, Nick had put it in exactly its original position; and now, as he studied them, he was suddenly impressed with the idea that neither of them could have fallen naturally into their present positions after being struck with the dagger.

One—the one he had removed and returned—was huddled upon his crooked body, face down to be sure.—It will be remembered that both men had been stabbed in the back.—At first glance it would not occur to anybody that he had not fallen in that position; but as Nick studied the attitude of the dead Chinaman, he decided that the victim had been *dropped* there—in other words, that he had been carried into the room and thrown carelessly upon the floor *after* he was dead.

For confirmation of this thought, he turned his attention to the other corpse.

In this case the man was lying on his back with his arms and legs outstretched in such a manner that he formed a very good figure of the letter X.

Plainly, he also had been thrown down there after he was killed.

The detective left the room and searched again through the back of the house. He visited the rooms where the two Chinamen slept; he searched the kitchen; he visited the cellar; he inspected the pantries—and then he returned to the dining-room again.

"It only shows," he mused half aloud, "how entirely easy it is for a practical person to do stupid things—or to fail to perform one that is only ordinarily bright. I should have comprehended, the moment I entered this room and discovered those two bodies, that the murders were not committed in this room, and that the two men were killed separately, and afterward were brought here by the assassin.

"It is certain that Pearsall did not kill the men in the library.

"It is certain that he did not kill them in this room.

"It is certain that he did not seek them out to kill them.

"So now the question arises, thus:

"After Pearsall, believing that I was on the point of abandoning his case, determined to work upon my sympathies by preparing a couple of actual crimes for me to investigate—after he had worked out his plan to his own satisfaction, and arranged how he would tie himself in the chair and gag himself so that it would appear that he was also nearly a victim of unknown assailants, how did he go about the actual commission of the crime?

"The answer is obvious. He merely selected some part of the house to which he could summon his servants, one by one, and so, would be able to strike them down as they turned about to leave him. That place would be in a remote part of the house, from which a cry of pain, if uttered by one of them, would not penetrate to the ears of the other.

"And that place would be in Pearsall's own sleeping-room—the only room in the house that has been in constant use, which I have not yet examined."

The detective turned abruptly, passed through the front of the house and up the stairs, and presently pushed open a door and entered the sleeping-room of the murderer.

He raised the windows and opened the blinds, letting in a flood of light; and then he returned directly to the door through which he had entered the room.

The rug in front of the door was unstained.

In appearance it was utterly innocent of any suggestion of a crime having been committed there, but, at last, by assiduous search, the detective, through his glass, discovered one very small spot of blood.

It was considerably at one side of the door, three or more feet from where it should have been, it seemed to Nick; and he stood puzzling himself about it for a moment.

Then he smiled.

"Sure!" he said to himself. "Pearsall prepared himself for this thing in every way. He spread something down there on the floor to catch the blood, and to catch the victim when he fell upon it, also.

"A sheet would not answer. Blood would soak through

that. There would be the same objection to an ordinary blanket. A quilt, then.

"Now, a quilt would not be an easy thing to hide; where would he conceal it?

"He would know that I would search the house and the barn, after these murders, and he would use extreme care in his selection of a hiding-place.

"He would not care to go out upon the street with his bundle, for several reasons. First, his dislike of going out at all; second, the likelihood of being seen and stopped by a policeman, who might ask unpleasant questions about the bundle; and third, the time and trouble of doing it."

The detective turned in his tracks and looked about the room.

Over at one side there was a fireplace which contained a basket grate—long unused, of course, and at this season of the year totally unnecessary; and yet, as the detective looked toward it, he plainly saw finger-marks along the top of one side of that grate.

"The fellow would never be foolish enough to poke the things up there," thought the detective; "and yet, for some reason, he has been on his knees in front of that grate, and has looked up it. Now, suppose I do the same? I won't find the quilt and the dagger there—but I may find a suggestion which will tell me where to look for it."

He dropped upon his hands and knees, and, bending low, peered as best he could up the flue behind the fireplace.

It was dark and forbidding and dirty, and he could just discover a glimmer of light from above, which told him that he had been correct in supposing that the things were *not* there.

But, of a sudden, the detective bounded again to his feet.

"I know now," he exclaimed. "It is as simple as can be. He looked up that flue merely to determine if it extended to the top of the chimney—*because if it did, he could safely use the other half of the chimney—the other flue—for the concealment of his articles.*"

Nick turned and hastened through the door. He hurried to the adjoining room.

It was entirely barren of furniture, but there was a fireplace in there which backed up against the one in the sleeping-room.

It was covered by a fireboard, but this the detective quickly removed and threw aside.

As he did so, he discovered another reason why the man had gotten upon his knees in front of the other grate; it had been to collect a handful of soot and dust with which to cover up the evidences of his later presence at this one.

There was no glimmer of light through this flue, and after satisfying himself of that much, the detective thrust his arm far up inside, and—in a moment more he had drawn down upon the bare floor in front of him, a neatly rolled quilt, which was terribly stained with partly dried blood; and as he unrolled it, a cross-hilted dagger—exactly the shape of the drawing he had made on the piece of paper—fell to the floor in front of him.

"It is all very simple after all," mused Nick. "One has merely to follow out the workings of another mind, whether it is diseased or not, to determine results."

He left the blanket and the dagger where he dropped them, for he had no further use for either of them just then, and turned away.

And as he did so, he heard the ringing of the door-bell at the front entrance, and knew that the officers for whom he had sent had arrived.

He was not sorry. He was quite ready to turn over the care of the house, and its gruesome contents, to others; and, more, he began to experience some of the anxiety expressed by Chick before his departure, and he was more than anxious to hurry home.

CHAPTER XI.

A MADMAN IN A FRENZY.

But it was not the officers for whom he had sent, who were awaiting him at the door.

The young man there was a hatless and coatless clerk from the neighboring drug store; and the instant the detective opened the door, he cried out:

"Are you Nick Carter, sir?"

"Yes," replied Nick. "What is it?"

"A man who said he was called Chick asked me over the telephone to run here as quick as I could do it, and to tell you that it is a matter of life and death that you get home just as quickly as ever you can do it."

The detective did not wait to hear more.

He pulled a bill from his pocket, and, without pausing to notice its denomination, dropped it into the hand of the clerk. Then he dashed past him, down the two steps, and reached the front gate in a few leaps.

Officers from the station arrived at the gate at the same instant, and Nick half halted; only just long enough to shout to them:

"Take charge of this house and all that is in it until your captain arrives, or until you hear from me. That young man there has just brought a message to me. Do not detain him. I can't stop now."

He was off like a shot. He went through the street on a run. He dashed into the subway. He just caught a train, which proved to be an express; but all the same, he fumed inwardly at every stop it made.

But it did good time for all of that.

His own station was reached in a surprisingly short time, and from there he went to his own house on a run.

As he turned the corner and came in sight of it, he discovered nothing to add to his present fears. The only trouble was that he did not know just what form that fear should take, for the message had only informed him that it was a matter of life and death that he should get there as soon as possible.

He well knew that Chick would never have sent an idle message—and he also knew that it would be no ordinary event which would induce the assistant to send for him at all.

In all situations, Chick had proven himself quite competent to fill the place of the detective in most things. His courage was as great, and his strength was almost the same.

He reached the house and dashed up the steps.

The front door was open, and he sprang inside—but only to trip over the prostrate body of Joseph—his valet—who was lying prone upon the floor with blood streaming from a cut in his forehead, and with a broken piece of bronze ornament lying near him to tell how the act had been committed.

The rack for the reception of hats and coats, that stood just inside the door, had been pulled to the floor and was an utter wreck.

A chair that had been near it was broken, and littered the floor.

Nick comprehended all these things at a glance, and he was in the act of bending over Joseph, in order to ascertain how badly he had been hurt, when one of the servants appeared coming down-stairs, wringing her hands together, and crying; for she had seen the arrival of her master from an upper window.

"Oh, sir," she exclaimed, "I am so glad you have come."

"What has happened?" demanded the detective at once; and perceiving that Joseph was not badly hurt, he started to his feet again, and confronted the woman.

"Oh, sir. That man. He nearly killed us all."

"How? Where is he now?"

"Gone."

"Gone where?"

"Out through the door, sir. Joseph, he tried to stop him here in the hall—and you can see what happened to him. The man was wild, sir. Awfully wild. I never saw a pair of eyes that blazed like his. And he screamed and took on——"

"Stop it! Answer my questions."

"Yes, sir."

"Where is Chick?"

"He has gone after the man, sir."

"Was he here when the trouble occurred?"

"Chick, sir? Yes, sir. That was how it happened."

"How did it happen. See if you can tell me a connected story. If Chick is after him, there is time to tell it, for we will hear the telephone presently. Now, what happened? Begin at the beginning."

"Well, sir, first off, Ferdinand brought the man here in the automobile. He seemed all quiet and tame enough then. Ferdinand said that he was to have a seat in the library until you returned, and that I was to keep an eye on him to see if he wanted anything, but that I was not to go near him unless it was necessary."

"Yes. Well?"

"Then Ferdinand went away to take care of the machine."

"Where was Joseph?"

"He had gone out to the corner, sir, to do an errand of some kind; I think it was one you told him to do before you went out this morning."

"Yes," said Nick. "I remember. Well?"

"The door into the library was half open and through the crack of it I could see that the stranger was reading a magazine. He seemed all right. I never suspected that he was not."

"Never mind that. Go on."

"Well, after a little while—quite a long while it was—Joseph returned, and I told him about the man in the library. He heard me, and then, with the big bundle he

had brought, he walked straight into the library and put it on a chair there."

"Confound him!" murmured Nick. "Did he open the bundle?"

"No, sir. He put it on the chair; and then I heard him speak to the man. I couldn't hear what they were talking about, only I could see through the crack of the door, that they both looked at the bundle two or three times, so I concluded that they were saying something about that."

The detective muttered something under his breath—a something that was decidedly impatient; for the truth was that the bundle to which such frequent references was made, had contained a large American flag which the detective had ordered, and intended that same evening to present to a cadet corps of a neighboring public school. He knew now what had happened, and that the flag had somehow been the cause of it.

"Go on with your story," he ordered.

"After a little, Joseph came out of the library, and he called to me just as I was going up the stairs.

"'That's a rum cove in there, Madge,' he says to me. 'What do you suppose he wanted me to do? He wanted me to show him what was in the bundle. The cheek of him! First off, he up and asks what is in the bundle, and when I tells him that it is an American flag, he is hot to see it. But I told him that it couldn't be opened without my master's orders. The chief told me to put it in the library when I brought it home, and there it is. I wonder if that chap will have the cheek to open it of his own account!'"

"And that is precisely what he did do—after he had heard what it was," muttered the detective. "He knew that it was red and white, and he could not resist the passion to see it. Go on."

"Well, sir, I went up-stairs; and Joseph, he went into the little room at the end of the hall, where he sits. I didn't hear no more until I heard a'wild sort of a scream.

"When I heard that, I rushed to the stairs, and I saw that Mr. Chick had come in. When I looked down the stairs, I saw that he was in the doorway of the library, struggling with the man that had asked about the bundle; and then, sir, that man bent backward somehow, and he threw Mr. Chick clear over his head, just as if it were a child instead of a man that he was handling. I would never have supposed that he could do it—or anybody else, for that matter, unless it was just, sir."

"Go on! Go on!"

"I think that Mr. Chick must have been stunned as he fell, for he did not get up at once. Then I saw Joseph running through the hall. He grappled with the crazy man, too, and they tore at each other's throats all the way to the front door. And then the crazy man grabbed that bronze image and struck Joseph with it, and he fell—and just as he fell, I saw Mr. Chick come staggering out of the library.

"The crazy man saw him, too, for he uttered a shriek and ran out of the house—and Mr. Chick ran after him.

"That is all I know, sir, but I was that frightened, that I ran back up the stairs and hid myself in my room; and then——"

"Who telephoned to me?" asked the detective.

"I don't know, sir. I did not know that anybody did."

"How long ago did all this happen? How long is it since Chick ran out of the house after the crazy man?"

"Oh, sir, it seems a good while, but I don't suppose it is very long. It might be half-an-hour."

The detective turned away and entered the library.

There, torn into shreds almost, and littering the floor, was the flag he had ordered. Its brilliant stripes of red and white were everywhere, and the detective understood perfectly what had happened.

The man had asked, out of mere idle curiosity, what the package contained, and Joseph had told him that it was an American flag.

Doubtless another article did not exist which could have suggested to Pearsall's imagination so quickly and so vividly, those colors which produced such a terrible effect upon him.

Merely thinking of them had produced the same desire to see them, as the smell of fish induces in a cat the desire to devour it. He had besought Joseph—now reviving under the ministrations of Madge—to open the bundle, and being refused, he had opened it himself, just at the instant, or just before it, when Chick stepped into the library.

The combination of the two colors had brought to the surface all the madness of the man, and with a cry of fury he had thrown himself upon the assistant.

But who had sent the telephone message?

As if in reply to the question, there was at that moment a ring at the bell, and upon going to the door in person, Nick found a young lad there.

"Are you Mr. Carter?" he asked; and, upon being assured of the fact, he continued:

"Well, sir, I met a man running after another one and he threw me a dollar and told me to run along with him while he told me something. And then he told me to call up a drug store up-town over the phone—he gave me the number—and to tell a clerk there to go to a yellow house over the hill and tell Nick Carter——"

"I know the rest, thank you," said Nick. "Here is another dollar. Where did you last see the two men that were running through the street?"

"Just a block below here, sir. I don't know where they went to. But I did know where you lived and I thought I would come back here to see if you got the message, so that I could send it again if you hadn't—and also to see if it was true about its being a matter of life and death. You see, sir——"

But Nick Carter's telephone bell rang out at that instant, and the loquacity of the youth was squelched for the moment.

It was the voice of Chick that came to the detective from the other end of the phone, and in reply to Nick's hello, he said:

"I am glad that you have got there. We have got a proposition on our hands down here, and I think you had better get here as soon as you can."

"Where are you?" asked Nick.

"At the Flatiron Building. The crazy cuss has taken possession of the roof, and he has got a bag of golf-clubs that he grabbed from a man on the street. We are letting him rest a little, in the hope that he will cool off, but I'm afraid he will kill somebody before we capture him."

"Leave him alone till I get there," ordered Nick; and he hung up the receiver.

CHAPTER XII.

A FIGHT AMONG THE CLOUDS.

When Nick Carter stepped from the car in front of the Flatiron Building, he could scarcely make his way through the crowd that had collected, for it had become generally known already that a madman had taken refuge on the towering roof, and was defying the whole world to come near to him.

But the detective quickly made his way inside the building, and took one of the elevators to the top floor, where he found Chick and half-a-dozen policemen on guard.

One of the officers had a welt across his forehead the size of an egg, and another was still wiping blood upon his handkerchief, which trickled from his bruised nose.

"That chap is a peach," volunteered the latter, when Nick looked at him and smiled. "He has managed to bar every approach to him, but one, and he stands guard over that. Whenever a head appears, he hits it—or hits at it, which is much the same thing. I think he is a golf-player himself—that's what I think."

"I haven't a doubt of it," rejoined Nick. "And doubtless he took your head for a regulation ball, when you showed it. Do you happen to know if it was a niblick, or a brassy, or a cleek that he hit you with, eh?"

"Well, sir, I should judge that it was all three at once, if it's all the same to you," replied the officer, with a grin.

"Have you had a try at him, Chick?" asked the detective, turning to his assistant.

"No; I thought it just as well to let him rest and cool off—and to wait for you."

The detective walked a little apart from the group, and lost himself in thought for a moment; but presently he turned and began to divest himself of his coat and waistcoat.

"What are you going to do?" asked Chick.

"Wait a moment and you will see," replied Nick.

He rolled the waistcoat into a ball, and tied it so, with a string which one of the policemen produced in response to his request for such an article.

Next, he fixed his own hat firmly upon this improvised imitation of a head, and then he borrowed a night stick from one of the officers.

This he poked firmly between the folds of the waistcoat where it was thrust into the hat, and thus he provided himself with a very fair imitation of the real article—at least, he believed that the whole thing would look enough like a head, when he poked it out in the face of the madman, so that he would strike at it; and that was all that the detective desired him to do.

He merely wished to gain time to leap upon the roof himself, before the man could strike him with one of the clubs; after that, he would take his chances.

He knew all about the proverbial strength of madmen, and he had already been told how this one had thrown Chick over his head as if he were a child; but the detective did not hesitate in what he had elected to do, for all that.

"I think we are ready now," he said.

"Are you going out on the roof, sir?" asked one of the policemen.

"Yes," replied Nick. "That is exactly what I am going to do."

"May I go with you?"

The detective looked at the man in surprise; and then he said:

"Thank you. That is the way to talk. No; you may not go with me, but you may follow me as soon as you like—after Chick."

Nick approached the place of exit very carefully and silently—and then, suddenly, when he believed the moment to be propitious, he poked the stuffed hat out almost into the face of the man who was waiting there with brandished club, ready to strike whosoever should appear.

The madman saw it.

With the imperfect sight of his maddened and bloodshot eyes, he supposed it was the head of one of his enemies, and he brought the iron lofter that he held in his grasp down upon it with such a terrible blow that the instrument tore hat and waistcoat clean away from the officer's night stick, to which it had been fastened, and sent it whirling past the detective, into the interior of the building.

But the blow, and the force of it—and the consequence of it—afforded just the opportunity the detective wanted, for it swung the man half around, so that he almost lost his balance.

In that instant Nick Carter leaped out upon the roof.

As the lofter was raised for a second blow, Nick ducked and succeeded in dodging under it, so that this time the implement was shattered into several pieces against the roof of the building.

Instantly Nick sprang toward the man and seized him around the waist; but then, as the detective tried to lift him from his feet and throw him, he received an exhibition of that wonderful and mysterious strength which a madman sometimes possesses.

How he did it, Nick Carter did not know, but all the same, he managed to wriggle himself loose from the detective's grasp almost as soon as it rested upon him.

With a wild cry, he sprang away, and ran across the roof of the building, so that the detective, pursuing him, thought that the man was about to throw himself into the street, and he stopped in his tracks.

But this act gave the madman another opportunity, and he doubled on the detective, darting back again toward his weapons, and managing to secure one.

This time it was a putter that he brandished in the air as Nick approached him cautiously, and Nick knew that if once the iron head of that short, but terrific, club should hit him, the stroke of it would be fatal.

But the madman backed away as Nick approached him, and so the detective was enabled to seize upon another of the clubs—a driver.

Using this for a shield, he advanced cautiously, holding the strange weapon as he would have done with a sword; and, at the same time, calling to his companions to stand back and leave him to finish the combat alone; for they were passing nearer and nearer, and the detective feared that the crazed man would leap from the roof to the street, hundreds of feet below, and be dashed to pieces against the pavement.

As the detective advanced the madman retreated.

Thus they traveled in a circle, and three times in this manner they made the entire circuit of the roof, which is not extensive.

Four times the detective got near enough to the man so that he struck at him with the putter, but each time the detective caught the descending blow upon the driver he held in his hand, and so warded it aside; and it was remarkable that his own slender weapon was not shivered into fragments by the less flexible putter.

After a time the man lost his direction, and kept farther away from the edge of the roof; and this was what the detective desired.

He followed more closely now, and, at last, perceiving, as he believed, his opportunity, he struck an upward blow with his driver, and so knocked the putter aside for an instant.

Then he darted under the guard of the madman and so succeeded again in seizing him.

But again the man broke away and ran—and this time he made straight for the edge of the roof at a speed, and with an impetus, that Nick believed would certainly carry him over it into the street.

He exerted himself in that instant, more than he had yet done.

Leaping forward, he again succeeded in seizing upon the madman—and the next instant they were locked together in a terrible struggle, almost on the edge of the yawning gulf.

So near were they to the edge of the roof, that the

throngs gathered in the streets below could see them, and a low murmur came up from the excited people, for it seemed then inevitable that both must fall and be killed.

On the roof itself, nobody dared to approach them.

A mere touch against them might prove to be the added straw that would precipitate them to certain death.

For the space of a few seconds, Nick Carter thought, himself, that the end of all things had come for him.

His own great strength seemed almost puny beside the maddened might of the crazed man; and yet the detective managed somehow to retain enough of his weight toward the center of the building to offset it.

Then, when the detective determined that if this sort of thing continued any longer, they would both be killed, he resorted to a trick which only occurred to him at that moment.

He suddenly sank down—his back was toward the building—and so pulled the madman toward him.

As he fell, he raised his legs in the air, and thus brought the man down upon him, and so he threw him over his head, and sent him sprawling upon the roof again.

In an instant the others who were watching the struggle dashed forward to capture the madman; in that same instant Nick Carter leaped again to his feet; and, also, in that same instant of time, the madman himself leaped up, and, succeeding in eluding all of them, he uttered a wild cry and a wilder laugh, and fled away across the roof again.

And then, in another instant, it was all over.

The madman did not pause this time.

He ran straight for the edge of the roof, leaped upon the cornice at the corner, and then sprang far out into the air, just as a man dives into the water.

From below there came a shriek of horror.

On the roof everybody turned his head away, and there followed an utter silence.

"Come!" said the detective presently.

He led the way into the building. He picked up his wrecked hat, and having straightened it out as best he could, placed it on his head. Then he resumed his coat and waistcoat, and led the way to the elevator, the others following silently behind him.

At the bottom of the elevator shaft, Nick murmured to his assistant:

"Poor Jones! Poor chap! But it was by far the best thing that could have happened to him. I'll leave you here to attend to things, Chick. I am going home."

That evening, when the two detectives were smoking their cigars together, in the study, Chick suddenly broke a long silence by asking:

"Nick, what do you suppose induced that poor fellow to come to you with the story he did and engage your services to hunt himself down?"

"Just because he was crazy—that's all," was the reply. "He remembered that I was a detective. He had plenty of money that he had stolen from his father. He wanted excitement. He was a madman; that answers all the questions you could ask."

THE END.

The next issue—No. 485—will be "The Veiled Princess; or, Nick Carter's Secret Accomplishment."

About the Early Numbers of

Tip Top Weekly

We receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 260 are entirely out of print.

We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays."

We give herewith a complete list of all the stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a free colored cover catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

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